

Date: Sun, 28 Feb 1999 12:52:01 -0500 (EST)
From: David Lipman <lipman@ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>
X-Sender: lipman@void
To: Harold_Varmus@nih.gov
Subject: Re: follow up
MIME-Version: 1.0

I'll be interested in reading your essay Harold.

I mentioned the issue of excluding journals/editorial boards not on the basis of quality but scope - there must be some simple way to delineate those existing and new journals/editorial boards which are appropriate for inclusion. If one needs a committee for this, that can be a problem though not an insurmountable one. If a simple rule will do (i.e. the scope is biomedicine and the editorial board must include at least one NIH grantee) then that'd be preferable.

Is it possible to capture the essence of your idea in a few sentences? What I took from the conversation was that NIH would not be starting any new journals here - rather, NIH would provide a system for facilitating submission, review, and access. Thus "NIH Research" would really be the resulting repository from many journals, existing and new. Each might have different scope (within biomedicine), review mechanisms, selectivity, etc.. But an author could submit to any of these journals in a standard format and to a single site. We can elide the technical aspects of this processing system and retrieval system for now. All articles in the NIH collection would be freely accessible to all and richly interlinked and linked to other factual databases and other material but they would also clearly be able to be accessed from a "journal-centric" view thus facilitating browsing.

Why should a journal agree to "giving away their content"? If it's a commercial journal already making a profit, then this is unlikely. If it's a society journal making a profit, it may also be unlikely - at least at first. However, the society members may ultimately push for this. If it's a society whose journal is not running a net profit, this NIH system would be very desirable. If it's a new journal, especially a non-commercial one, then this is a big, big win - because one saves a ton of money and gets access to an almost unlimited audience. Even some new commercial journals may profit from a hybrid approach (a la Vitek Tracz) - primary research goes through the NIH repository, and the print journal skims the cream and also provides reviews, etc.. Even Pat Brown (and myself) could be made happy because a journal experimenting with new approaches to review could be started on a dime because of NIH system.

There could be an open competition of ideas as to the best way to handle review etc. within this system. And NIH wouldn't have to be in the business of dictating on these issues...

Is this the basic idea? If so, then one needn't wait to convince a bunch of society's. One could touch base with a number of members of different society's to get their thoughts, as well as folks like Pat and Vitek, and then "publish" your plan and get started hoping some journals/editorial boards will come on board.

David